



Thursday, October 30, 2003

490th Civil Affairs renovates Abu Ghraib daycare center

Story and photos by Spc. Chad D. Wilkerson
372nd MPAD

BAGHDAD, Iraq – Soldiers from the 490th Civil Affairs Battalion, an Army Reserve unit from Abilene, Texas, part of Task Force 1st Armored Division, have spent the past several months working with Abu Ghraib community leaders reconstructing schools and establishing community relations.

Capt. Thane Thompson, a team chief with 490th, brought his team to the grand reopening of Al Firdus daycare center in the Abu Ghraib district Oct. 25 to see the finished product of all their weeks of hard work.

"We are here today for the opening of the daycare center after having been closed down since the conflict in Iraq," said Spc. Ciria Crawford, civil affairs specialist with the 490th and project manager for daycare center reconstruction. "The center was very badly looted during and after hostilities in the country, and there were even rumors of land mines in the backyard here."

Months ago, the team, using Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds, began working on the daycare center in Abu Ghraib, as well as several other community buildings and services in the neighborhood.

Contractors were hired to do the majority of the building restoration, including painting, plumbing and electrical work, said Crawford. Engineers also visited the center to clear the lot behind it of any possible unexploded ordnance.

By hiring local Iraqi contractors for reconstruction efforts, U.S. Army personnel are putting money into the Iraqi economy, helping local unemployment and allowing Iraqis to take ownership of their own communities.

"This place was completely gutted, and we facilitated the restoration and supervised all the progress," said Thompson. "From the basic utilities, to toys, bottles and cribs, the center has been completely outfitted and is now ready to open."

Necessary funds, expertise and determination are essential ingredients in the U.S. Army's recipe for success. But even with those elements, the 490th has had no easy time with their work in Abu Ghraib.

While traveling down a main thoroughfare on the way to the next site, Crawford was able to point out and explain in detail many of the IED (improvised explosive device) incidents they had heard, seen or been informed of in the area.



The bulletproof windshields of one of the team's "up-armored" Humvees even have cracks from the shrapnel it absorbed during a mortar attack on the Forward Operating Base where the team stays nightly.

"There have been numerous IEDs (improvised explosive devices) around the area during the times we have been working here," Crawford said. "We had to adjust the route to get here safely, and have traveled down many alleyways where rocks were thrown at us."

The fact that Thompson, Crawford and their team have endured the hardships and have not been deterred from their mission will surely mean a better life and a brighter future for the Iraqi citizens they have helped. Both say they are proud of the work they have done and the welfare of the Iraq people is their motivation.

"The people I have spoken with here are very appreciative on the whole," said Thompson. "This is one of 10 projects we have going on right now, and getting these schools and facilities back into operation is not only beneficial, but essential to getting Iraq back to normalcy. It is definitely a good feeling knowing that we are helping them."

"At times you can get frustrated when locals are throwing rocks and cursing at you when you are there to help them," said Crawford, "but then you see the children and the progress we are making. When I see the little children smiling, like today, here at the daycare center, I can see the future of Iraq in their faces. That is how I stay motivated."

The Old Ironsides Report October 30, 2003

NEWS

Iran Demands Concessions From U.S. in Return for Cooperation

By NAZILA FATHI, New York Times

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TEHRAN, Oct. 29 — Iran said Wednesday that it would not share intelligence with the United States on operatives of Al Qaeda or hand over Qaeda suspects in Iranian detention and would resume dialogue only after the United States undertakes what it termed measures to build confidence.

It was not clear whether the United States would first have to restore diplomatic relations broken after the storming of the American Embassy in Tehran in the fall of 1979.

"You cannot threaten from one side and freeze assets from the other side; level accusations from one side and then request dialogue from the other side; we need to see America's practical steps," the government spokesman, Abdullah Ramezanzadeh, told reporters.

"They have leveled too many false accusations against us and they should stop that," he said. "They should also unfreeze our assets and lift the sanctions."

Mr. Ramezanzadeh was responding to comments made Tuesday by Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage, who signaled American willingness to hold limited talks with Iran. Mr. Armitage, striking a conciliatory tone, also said that the Bush administration did not favor "regime change" in Iran.

By contrast, President Bush in his 2002 State of the Union address grouped Iran with Iraq and North Korea as an "axis of evil."

The United States severed talks with Iran after a series of bombings in Saudi Arabia in May which the United States said were linked to groups based in Iran. Iran has denied the assertion.

Battling blazes takes toll on firefighters; 12,000 firefighters battle blazes in California

From the Wolf Blitzer Reports staff in Washington:

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- So many fires, huge in size, are raging in Southern California that some of the biggest are not even half-contained. On the front lines, the work is dangerous, exhausting and, at the moment, seemingly without end. "Right now it's bordering on chaos. We're just trying to stay ahead of it," says one firefighter. Twelve thousand firefighters are now battling these infernos. They're from local communities, so-called "wild-land" firefighters from the federal government, neighboring states and military bases. These men and women are working shifts of 8, 12, sometimes even 24 hours. Fatigue is their constant partner. Terry Dejournett of the Los Angeles County Fire Department says, "They're doing pretty good. They're getting a little rest, and they are getting tired, but they're here for the end run."

When they come off the line, getting "rest" is relative. They go to the nearest base camp for what firefighters call "rehabilitation." They eat, replenish body fluids, do maintenance on their equipment, get a briefing from their incident commander and if there's time, nap.

Oddly Enough

Americans flock to get on NRA blacklist

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Most blacklists are designed to intimidate. But thousands of Americans are clamoring to join one drawn up by the National Rifle Association (NRA). Actor Dustin Hoffman was so dismayed to find his name missing from the NRA's shadowy 19-page list of U.S. companies, celebrities, and news organizations seen as lending support to anti-gun policies that he wrote to the powerful pro-gun lobby group begging to be included. "As a supporter of comprehensive gun safety measures, I was deeply disappointed when I discovered my name was not on the list," Hoffman wrote in a letter to the NRA that was released Tuesday. "I was particularly surprised by the omission given my opposition to the loophole that makes it legal for 18- to 20-year-olds to buy handguns at gun shows," he added. Hoffman's name has now been added to the list which reads like a Who's Who of American business, culture and religion and which ranges from the American Jewish Congress to A&M Records, ABC News and talk show queen Oprah Winfrey. An NRA spokesman could not be reached for comment. The list was found deep in the official NRA Web site by a group of grass-roots anti-gun campaigners and publicized by them two weeks ago to garner support for two pieces of gun control legislation going through Congress.

SPORTS

Political lines drawn by pigskin, not party, as senators tackle BCS

WASHINGTON - With a deepening crisis in Iraq and an economy slow to produce jobs, the Senate Judiciary Committee naturally turned its attention Wednesday to . . . college football. Well, not just any Saturday classics but the controversial Bowl Championship Series - much derided for creating a separate and unequal ranking system leading to an anointed game for the mythical national championship. Call it Good Ol' Boys jawing about a boys' game, but the BCS produces nearly \$100 million in annual revenue, mostly from television, as part of the estimated \$3 billion-a-year college sports industry. College football, said one witness, "is a proud symbol of America," and the Senate panel seemed intent on reinforcing that notion.

This Day in History

30 October

1270 8th & last crusade is launched

1864 Helena, Montana's capital, founded

1918 Slovakia asks for creation of Czechoslovakian state

1922 Mussolini forms cabinet in Italy

1938 Orson Welles panics a nation with radio broadcast of "War of the Worlds"

1939 USSR and Germany agree on partitioning Poland

1941 USS Reuben James torpedoed by Germans, even though US is not in war

1944 Anne Frank (of Diary fame) is deported from Auschwitz to Belsen

1945 US government announces end of shoe rationing

1954 Defense Department announces elimination of all segregated regiments

1956 Israel captures Egyptian military post at El-Thamad

1961 Soviet Party Congress unanimously approves a resolution removing Josef Stalin's body from Lenin's tomb in Red Square

1961 Soviet Union tests a 58 megaton hydrogen bomb

